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GERMANS FROM RUSSIA CAME TO LODI

by Ralph Lea & Janice Roth

Germany was comprised of a number of smaller independent states which had existed from feudal times. These realms often engaged in disputes among themselves. During the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648) whole villages, cities and farms had disappeared. Thousands of people left Germany for other countries to build a new life where they could practice religious freedom, have space to farm and be free of oppression. The people remaining fell prey to the invad-

ing French Army of Louis the XIV and the Russian Cossacks of Frederick the Great.

In 1762, when Catherine the Great ascended the throne of Russia she began a campaign to populate the vast plains of Russia. Her December 1762 Manifesto, proclaimed the large agriculture areas near the Volga River and the Black Sea open to settlers of all foreign nationalities. Catherine, being of German decent, actively sought

Germans to come to Russia. She offered community self-government, provisions for transportation, expense money, freedom of religion, exclusion from military service, no taxation for thirty years, interest-free capital for houses, stock, tools and the promise that these privileges would be extended to their descendants.

Settlement of the Volga River and the Black Sea areas began from 1763-1765 with a common religious denomination being the predominate



▲ A Crowd gathering to register their property under the Homestead Act of 1862. They were allowed to stake out and claim 160 acres and could buy an additional 160 acres.



▲ If settlers did not have time to build a sod house they would dig out the side of a hill or dig down and build a roof with branches and cover it with dirt. This dugout would be their shelter until they had time to build a proper sod house.



▲ Making sod-Prairie sod was cut into rows with a special plow and then cut into blocks.

factor in establishing a settlement. The Evangelicals, Reformed Lutheran and Baptists dominated the Volga, Baltic, Crimean, Causcasus and a little later the Volhynia areas. The Mennonites and Catholics were dispersed just a few years later in the same regions.

There was no migration from Germany to Russia for thirteen years after 1788 due to the wars in Crimea.

When Catherine's grandson, Alexander I, became the Russian ruler he issued his own Manifesto in 1801 encouraging immigration into newly acquired Crimean territories and expanded the Black Sea Region.

The German life, customs,

morals, church and schools prospered in their settlements in Russia. German farmers practiced the custom or tradition of passing on their land to the eldest son. The younger sons were forced to work for the oldest or seek employment elsewhere.

The relationship between the German communities and the Russian Government was good until 1825 when Nicholas I started his reign. Things began to change when all were subjected to a new legal code and foreign settlers were not welcomed.

In 1855 Alexander II, son of Nicholas I, became czar and started a campaign to nationalize all ethnic

groups (including Germans) by using a program called "Russianization."

On February 19, 1861, the Emancipation Act placed all German communities under Russian rule. By 1870 the czars' edict put every Russian subject to serve in the army, if necessary.

The final straw came in 1874 when all Germans were required to serve in the czar's military. This resulted in a large scale migration out of Russia. Some, including Mennonites, moved to Siberia, but others who had land and money felt loyal to Russia, and decided to stay. The German groups were to suffer the effects of a hate campaign during World War I by the revolutionaries during Russia's civil war (1918-1920) with its famine, deprivation, persecution and finally banishment and annihilation at the outbreak of World War II 1938-1941.

The promises of Catherine II and Alexander I manifesto's were broken and it was time for the German-Russians to become Russian citizens or emigrate elsewhere. In 1874 they were given ten years to decide.

United States agents were looking for settlers to develop the western states. The U.S. Homestead Act of 1862 opened the Midwest. The American Railroads were also engaged in immigration. The German-Russian people were looking for cheap land. Canada and South America provided other possibilities.

In the U.S., staging areas were established in Yankton, South Dakota, Lincoln, Nebraska and Topeka, Kansas. The immigrants disembarked from the trains and would then decide on a place to settle.

The Midwest prairies resembled the regions of their Russian homeland where they had grown wheat. Those who had some money went out to homestead immediately. Land could be purchased for around one dollar and fifty cents an acre in 160 acre plots. The law required homesteaders to live on the land for a



◀ A sod house was sometimes two bricks wide (36 inches) that were laid grass side down in brick ▲ fashion. Openings were left for doors and windows. The roof was laid grass side up.



number of years and to improve the land by planting trees and building some kind of residence.

This would cause future problems by not allowing the Germans to live in communities away from their farms as they had done in Russia. It resulted in ethnic German developments in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado.

Those who had need of money to start a farm worked in whatever job they could obtain. The women often took jobs washing clothes and cleaning houses. When they were able they moved to the land. Their first shelter may have been a "dugout" either dug into a hill or rise and covered with sticks and straw. In the spring and early summer mature sod was cut into rectangles to be used for constructing their sod house.

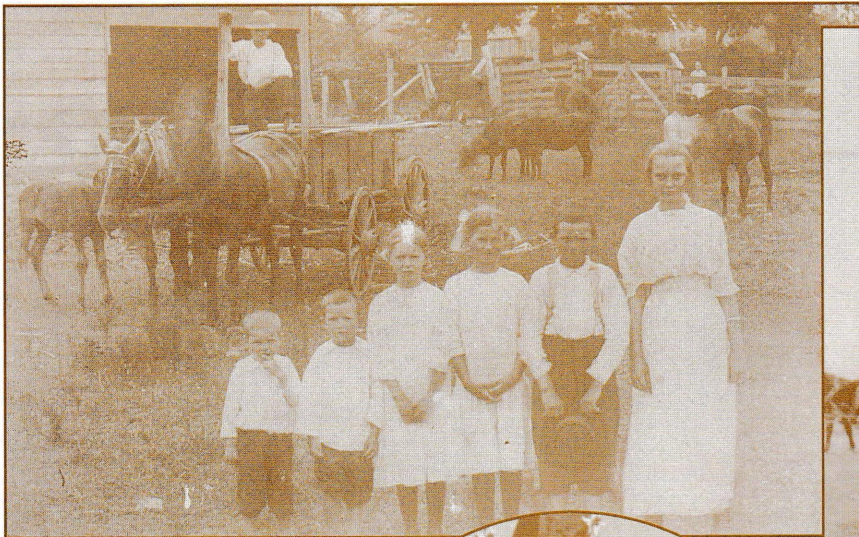
The Black Sea German's, who dominated The Dakota's, were predominately farmers. They also established stores, schools and churches usually all German speaking establishments. The large families worked as a unit with children, women and men all in the fields or wherever needed. Fathers hired out their sons for wages and the money went to the family funds until their marriage. Higher education was not encouraged and after school hours everyone worked.

The winters in the Dakotas were very harsh and epidemics of typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria and small pox took a high toll among the children.

Wheat was the primary crop but the climate in the Dakotas caused some crop failures.

There were stories of a better place further west. The Germans living in Menno, South Dakota planned to send a few men by train to check out the San Joaquin Valley. In the spring of 1896, William Hieb, Gottlieb Hieb, Ludwig Derheim and Jacob Mettler made plans to travel by train to Stockton to meet Otto Grunsky a real estate agent who spoke German. The four men had already visited the Los Angeles area but were more impressed by the Lodi area. The deep Hanford Sandy Loam soil which was suitable for growing a variety of crops and the favorable climatic conditions led the men to endorse Lodi as the place to be.

William Hieb and Ludwig Derheim bought parcels of Lodi land



▲ A typical farm would eventually have wooden buildings which were a welcome up grade after living in a sod house. The barn was usually built before a house of wood was built.



▲ Ed Preszler (wearing vest) was President of the Northern Fruit Company in Victor. Ladies were hired to pack the grapes. Mrs. Bender and Mrs. Eymmer are two of the workers pictured.



► The Salem Reformed Church at Lodi Avenue and Pleasant Streets.



▲ In 1923 the new Evangelical Church was built at Central and Elm Streets. Psalm 95:6 "O Come, let us worship and bow down: Let us kneel before the Lord our maker," was at the front on the church and expresses the faith of the German people in Lodi.

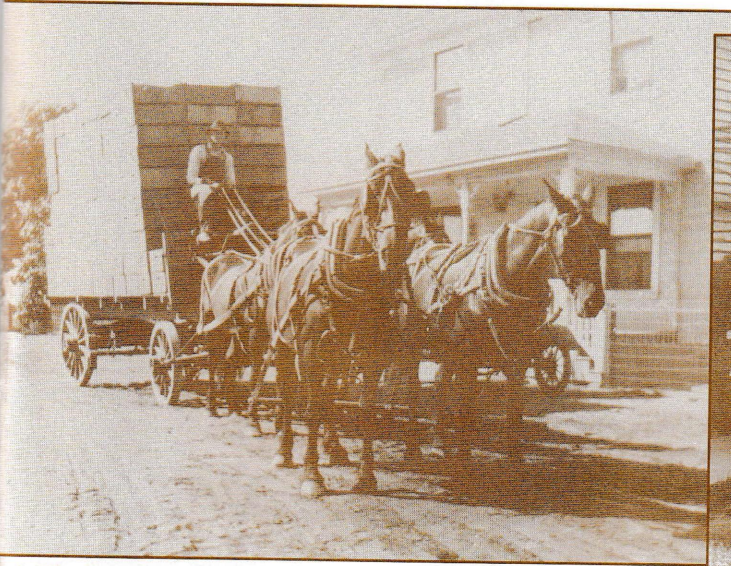


▲ Workers are knocking almonds off the trees with long poles. The almonds were boxed and hauled to the ranch to be hulled, dried and then sold.



▲ Pictured are (l-r) unknown, Nellie Gillespie, Viola Joens, and Edna Gillespie posing with grapes they were packing.

▲ On



▲ The Peter Joens Ranch was located on Victor Road. Charles Joens (son of Peter) is hauling a load of empty boxes.



St. Peter's German School with Rev. Jacobsen and Mr. Wagner the teacher. ▲



◀ The dedication of the Evangelical Church in Victor was held on July 16, 1910. Martha Nies Lea is on the far left.

▶ Inside of St. Peter's Lutheran Church (circa 1914) on the northwest corner of Church and Locust Streets. Henry Frey built the altar. The confirmation class standing with Rev. Wimkin included Anna Dreher and Floyd Blodgett.



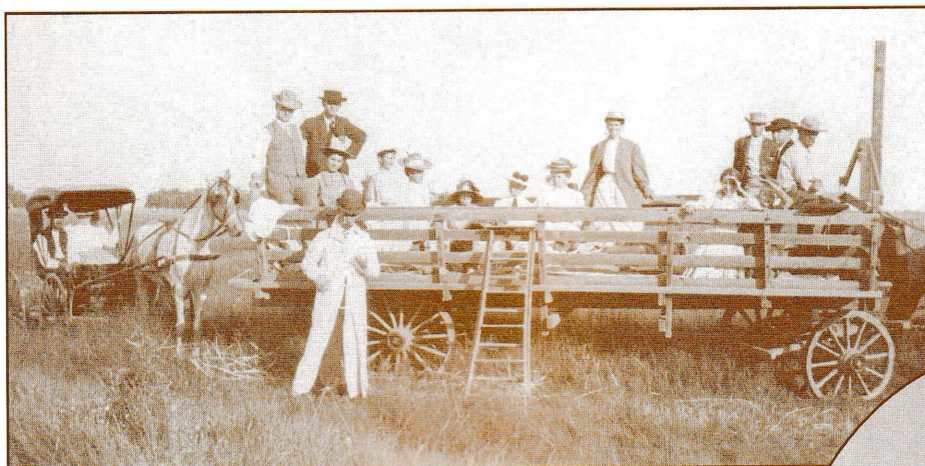
form of relaxation was going on a picnic.



▲ Horses were used to remove dead trees and vines.



▲ These girls take a break from packing grapes.



▲ A large group of friends ready for an outing. Wagon and buggy were common means of transportation.

before returning to South Dakota. Wilhelm (Columbus) Hieb purchased thirty acres on Kettleman Lane and west of the Southern Pacific Railroad. He planted Mission and Zinfandel Grapes in addition to a pasture to feed his cows. He later made wine and shipped some to South Dakota. Ludwig Derheim passed away soon after returning to South Dakota, but his widow and children moved to Lodi the following year.

When word was received back in Menno it was spread throughout the Dakotas. The German families were soon arriving in Lodi. There was a

hotel and restaurants nearby, but everyone went to the Hieb home. "Columbus" wife Charlotta and their daughter, Pauline, remember all the cooking and the boys sleeping in the barn on almond hulls. The day after the newcomers arrived Wilhelm would take the men by wagon to look at land that was for sale. The east

side of Lodi with its sandy soil was available and inexpensive in a lot of cases going for \$20-\$35 an acre. "Columbus" died in 1929.

Some of the migrating families after the Hiebs, Mettlers and Handels, were the Preszlers, Wiederriches, Nieses, Bittners, Mayers, Freys, Schmiedts, Bechtholds,

Kirschenmans and Benders all before 1905. That year the Heils and Finks came to Lodi followed by the Baum-bachs, Knolls,



◀ The new German Baptist Church in 1911 at Central and Oak Streets.

Lachenmaiers, Reimches, Feikerts and many more. East Lodi became the third and final stop in the migration for the

German-Russian people. They were still their close-knit community with life centered around the farm, school and church. Religion was very important and they immediately worshiped in the homes before building church buildings near the farms. Everything was in German except the schools. When the rural churches became too small for the members they started building in town, mostly on the east side of Lodi.

There were at least ten German churches built in Lodi in the early 1900's that were all German to begin with. The German Baptist on the corner of Oak & Central, German Congregational on the corner of Eden & Garfield, German Reformed on the corner of Eden & Central, Salem Evangelical on the corner of Elm &



▲ These horses were used for work and pleasure.



▲ A couple crossing the new Victor Bridge. Horses provided transportation in those early days.

Central, Salem Reformed on the corner of Lodi Avenue & Pleasant, St. Peters Lutheran on the corner of Church & Locust, Seventh Day Adventist German on East Hilborn, Church of Nazarene on East Hilborn, Mennonite Brethren on Flora and Emanuel Evangelical Lutheran at 309 S. Central were all very active in the early part of the century. The ladies sat on one side of the church and the men on the other. By the mid 1930's most German churches also had an English sermon and most of the Sunday Schools had discontinued German. There was no work, ball playing or any games on Sunday. The Adventist had the same rules for Saturday.

The Alpine and Victor Grammar Schools were mostly German children. English was spoken at school and German was spoken at home.

The Lodi district was still growing grain and watermelons by the turn of the century, but grape grow-

ing was quickly started by the Germans. Both Tokay table grapes and lots of wine grapes, such a zinfandel's, were heavily grown by the German landowners.

By 1933 the population of Lodi was 50% German residents with most of them living on the east side of town.

The German people from Russia



▲ The John Whitmire Family in 1919 enjoying Lodi watermelons. Mr. Whitmire sold real estate and insurance.



▲ Hieb's Hardware Store (1914) was located on the south side of Elm Street. L-r Jake Hieb, Karl Ulmer, unknown, Annie Handel, Big Jake Handel and Ed Handel are pictured inside the store.



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▲ The Handel Ranch on Alpine Road. About 1919 the Handel's installed and irrigation system. L-r Carl Kolthoff, Bernice Handel (on horse), E. F. Handel and Carl Jenner standing near a load of pipe from Spiekerman Pipe Company.

had a big influence on the development of Lodi starting in 1900. The town consisted of four churches and fourteen saloons and a reputation of a sporting center. They helped with the incorporation of Lodi in 1906, the increase of churches and the great reduction of drinking places in Lodi.

There were some minor problems during the first World War when there was a resistance to going into the army which was one of the reasons they left Germany and Russia. They were not anti-American but anti-war. Soon the boys went into the service and the German community supported the war and our local servicemen.

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